Presidents Report 2001-2002

Presented at the AGM on 26 October 2002

This year has been extremely busy and a productive one for the Society, with the hosting today of a Marine Forum being a slight departure from the norm for the Society but, as several speakers stressed, the need for marine conservation is just as high and urgent as the terrestrial environment. The forum was well attended and included many new faces and resulted in new memberships.

The Society has several main thrusts, publications, hosting of an Annual Scientific Forum, EMR grants to students to facilitate their research, and the hosting of a student day and the Whitley Awards. I would like to comment on all of these.

First off, the publications-

The Society has been highly productive as a publisher over the last year. There was an edition of the scientific journal, the *Australian Zoologist*, in April this year. The journal is edited by Dan Lunney and Brad Law, and is supported by an editorial committee comprising Peter Banks, Lyndall Dawson, Dieter Hochuli, Pat Hutchings and Ron Strahan. The Society also published four books over the last 12 months. They are *A Symposium on the Dingo* edited by Chris Dickman and Dan Lunney; *A Zoological Revolution* edited by Dan Lunney and Chris Dickman; *A Clash of Paradigms* edited by Dan Lunney, Chris Dickman and Shelley Burgin; and *Managing the Grey-headed Flying-fox as a threatened species in NSW*, edited by Peggy Eby and Dan Lunney. It is also pleasing to report that both the dingo and flying-fox books were largely funded by the NSW Scientific Committee under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in mutually beneficial contracts to deal with vexatious species in an independent forum and include both scientific and conservation interests as well as include the views of affected parties. Also, the *Zoological Revolution* book was co-published with the Australian Museum and the costs were equally shared. Further, the new arrangements for layout and printing, made after a competitive tendering process, have proved to be economical and efficient.

Several publications are in the pipeline including the new and revised Forest Fauna book and the Proceedings of last year's Urban Wildlife Forum. I have already mentioned the editorial committee but I would like to take this opportunity to thank personally and on behalf of the Society Dan Lunney who does an enormous amount of work in getting these publications together. Even though all papers are reviewed by at least 2 reviewers Dan reads and critically comments on every paper and liases with the layout people and the printers. Many other Societies pay a professional editor and we are extremely fortunate in having Dan although I would like to raise the possibility that at some time in the near future we should consider giving Dan some financial support to help him. These comments in no way belittle the contribution of the other members of the Editorial Committee but Dan is the driving force - Thank you Dan.

We are still developing ways in which to market these publications beyond our membership and details of all these are on our web site and we are selling some books this way. However, this is an area where we can improve and although we have advertised for a web person in our last 2 newsletters we have not any responses- so we are still hoping for a volunteer to help us with this. But in the meantime Peter Banks has been updating our web site and we are about to put on profiles of all Council members onto the web-and all details re the Whitley winners and EMR winners and calls for applications are being put up onto the web.

As I have already mentioned, this year's Annual Forum has a slightly different theme for the RZS in being marine- this obviously reflects my personal interests but the marine environment has in many ways been neglected by our politicians and the public and it is certainly time that we marine scientists became more political and made people aware of the major threats to our marine ecosystems.

Another major activity of the Society is the EMR awards, where students apply for funding to help with their research or participate in a Conference. While these grants are relatively small, they are very important to students and are highly sort after. Basically, the Society is trying to encourage the next generation of scientists and this is a very important role of the Society. I would like to see the value of these grants increased and the number we can award increased, but this will only happen if we increase our membership - more of that later. I should like to thank the EMR committee. It is chaired by Arthur White and I would like to thank him for all the work he does for this committee, as well as Shelley Burgin, who acts as the Secretary to the Committee, and committee members, Peggy Eby, Brad Law, and Will Meikle.

This year Dieter Hochuli and Peter Banks organised a very successful student day which was well attended, and instead of the students presenting posters or talks of their research they listened to professional scientists talking about getting jobs and the potential opportunities for graduate students in biology and this is an important role which the Society can play as students are increasingly becoming concerned about finding jobs or using their degrees in a constructive way. Thanks to Dieter and Peter for organising this - and I believe that we have found a very important niche, which is not occupied, and I hope we can continue with this initiative and even improve it for next year.

The Whitley Awards were very well attended this year in August at the Australian Museum and a medal was awarded to the "Tadpoles of SE Australia" by Marion Anstis, and another 6 awards were given from over 80 books which were submitted. For the first time we actually produced stickers with the medals and awards printed onto them and these were placed on the winning books. These graphics have been offered to the winning publishers and one winner, *Nature Australia* published by the Australian Museum, has already used these graphics in their next issue as well as an Editorial- perhaps very appropriate for Nature as most of you will be aware that Gilbert Whitley, after whom the awards are named, was the Curator of Fishes at the Australian Museum for over 30 years.

I think we can only go from strength to strength in promoting these books and cds, and the awards are being recognised as the only ones given to zoological books. The awards are important in promoting the objectives of the Society, which are to promote, preserve and conserve the indigenous animals of Australasia and their associated habitats. I would like to thank the committee which assessed these books: Arthur White who chaired the committee, which consisted of Noel Tait, Shelley Burgin, Chris Dickman and myself. They were also assisted by numerous specialists who reviewed individual books for us.

Finally, all these activities would not have been possible without an active Council and I would like to extend a personal thanks to all Council members. It was with regret that we accepted the resignation of Peter Wilson earlier this year as Secretary who had for several years fulfilled this role and was instrumental at Forum meetings helping with the IT. We wish him all the best. His place as Secretary has been ably taken by Peter Banks.

This year has been a somewhat trying year for Gilly Simpson, our Executive Officer, as the Zoo decided to undertake refurbishment of the Education Centre in which the RZS rooms are located and for several months Gilly and Ian Langford Brown, our treasurer, have effectively been camping in the demountables- well almost as we speak the new rooms are being finished and we hope that by our next Council meeting we will be installed in our new offices. At the same time we have been upgrading our membership database in order to try to keep better track of our members and to provide a better service to them - again this has had some teething problems but there is light at the end of the tunnel- we hope. A reflection of the attitude of Council is that several members offered help to Gilly, and Ian, in resolving these teething problems. Also during the year the Society signed a MOU with the Zoo and thus ensuring the close relationship between the RZS and the Zoo. Will Meikle, a member of Council but also an employee at the Zoo, has been helpful in liasing these moves, organising rooms for Council meetings and doing the logistics for this meeting- and I should like to thank the Zoo for providing this venue for free today.

So, finally, the Society is only as good as its members and while we have been able to maintain our membership we need to expand our membership as without this we will not be able to pursue new activities and ensure that the Society keeps up with all the changes occurring and that the Society remains a valuable and relevant member of the scientific community here in NSW and further afield. So the take home message from my report is for all of you to encourage your colleagues to join the Society and to stress to them the benefits whether by being eligible to apply for EMR awards to receiving a varied set of publications throughout the year. The forthcoming Forest Fauna book is certainly set to be a major reference book on this habitat.

So thank you for supporting the Society and I encourage you to consider publishing in the Society's journal.

Pat Hutchings